



## White Light

Clarke, P. (2004). White Light. *Perspective, The Journal of The Royal Society of Ulster Architects*, 13(5), 18-22.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

### **Published in:**

Perspective, The Journal of The Royal Society of Ulster Architects

### **Publication Status:**

Published (in print/issue): 01/09/2004

### **Document Version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via Ulster University's Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### **Take down policy**

The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [pure-support@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:pure-support@ulster.ac.uk).



# DESIGN PERSPECTIVE

## FOCUS ON HOMES

VOL 13 / NO.5 / SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2004 / £4 (€7)

BANGOR  
CASTLEWELLAN  
CONEY ISLAND



THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF  
ULSTER ARCHITECTS





# WHITE LIGHT

• 18

The Lisburn Road with its colourful and lively stretch of shops, cafes and restaurants forms a long artery of Belfast urban life. Set quietly amidst this is a new extension by Michael Doherty of Mackel & Doherty Architects to his own house. Having lived in the area for many years and in the original house for some time, before embarking on this project, it reveals the fruits of careful study and observation.

The frontage of the original brick 19th century farm labourer's house gives no indication of what lies behind. Moving towards the doorway of the small projecting porch, a glimpse through an original window gives an unexpected lens-like view of the new interior space through the 'looking glass' frame of the old house. The dark stained entrance door with its double slot vision panels gives a humorous measure of the respective eye heights of the houses' two occupants. This ocular

"By opening the back wall of the original house and introducing this new volume the house has been radically transformed. The simple and careful palate of materials throws the emphasis always on that of space, which in turn reveals the relationship to the changing colours and textures of the garden beyond."

signal hints that the eye should prepare for what is inside.

From the porch, a low slot space provides the start of a considered spatial sequence. The floating fireplace, framed visually at the end of this passage marks the extent of the newly constructed space. This glowing box sits beside the large glass window, mixing reflections and flames with the shape of the fruit trees in the garden outside. Strategically placed to pull you deep into the house, this fireplace



inventively reconfigures the traditional placement of the domestic hearth.

**Above** / Door hints at what lies beyond

**Right** / Direct sunlight admitted to the living space at high level

**Below** / Organisation of the plan reflected in the elevation



## THE TEAM

Client / Michael Doherty / Irene Kennedy

Architect / Mackel & Doherty

Structural / Martin Wynne Lavery

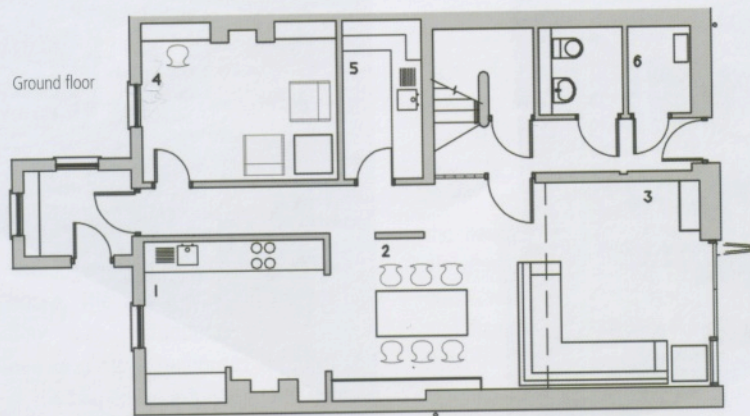
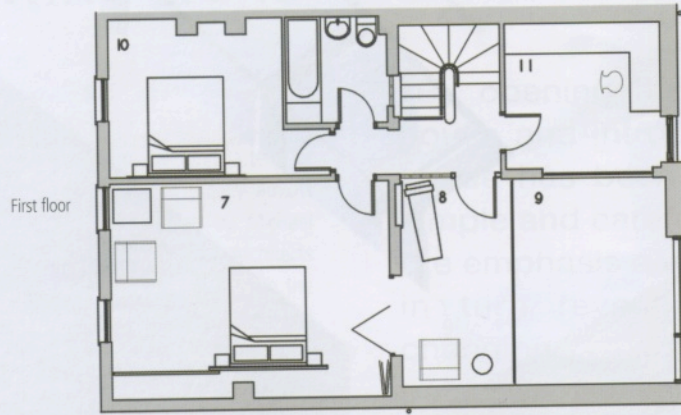
Main Contractor / Canavan Construction Ltd

Photography / Mackel & Doherty

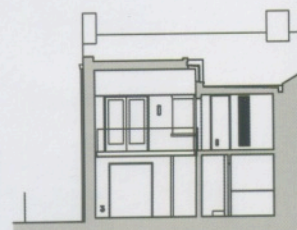
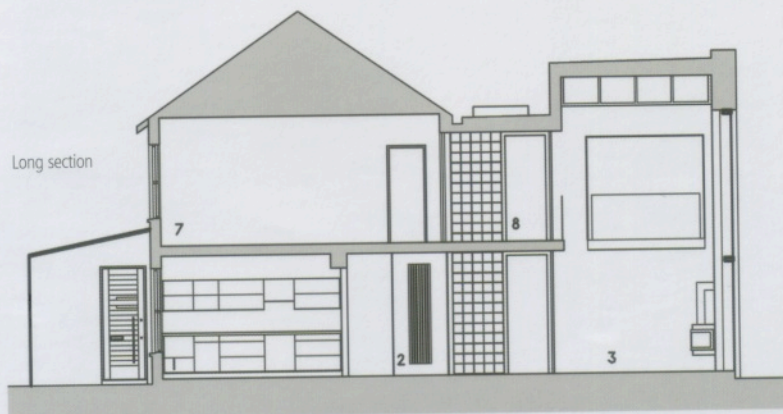




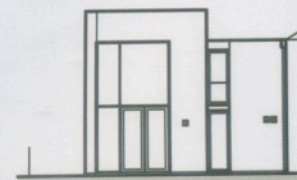




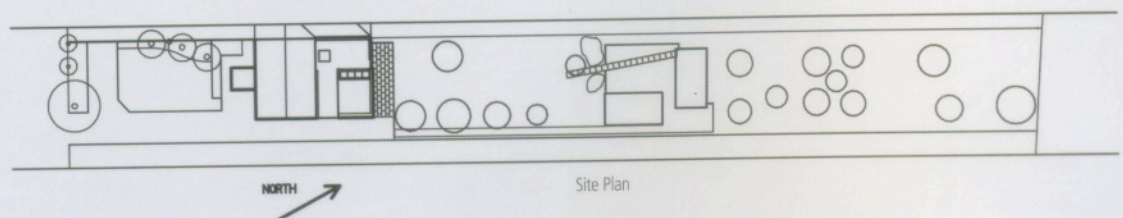
- 1 Kitchen
- 2 Dining
- 3 Living
- 4 Library/Study
- 5 Utility
- 6 Boiler/Store
- 7 Master Bedroom
- 8 Gallery
- 9 Void
- 10 Bedroom
- 11 Study/Bedroom



Short section



Rear elevation







**Left** / Texture of the original wall counters the simple white interior



**Left** / Activity of the house migrates into the garden

► Unfolding spatially as you move towards the garden side of the house, the large picture window engages and signals the scale of this unexpectedly large volume. It reveals the extent of the long strip garden with its sublime habitat of mixed hedges, fruit trees and wild flowers. The building and garden are locked in an inseparable conversation by this window, which seems to draw into the space the life of the garden outside. This large and dramatic dark framed window fills the house with light and registers the movements of the clouds across its reflective surface. This cinematic frame, folds out at the lower level, to allow the interior space and activity of the house to migrate into the garden and by so doing dematerialise any sense of barrier. The kitchen, dining and living room form one continuous sequential space, with the kitchen framed into alcove walls that minimize any possible dominance over that of the open plan space. The high flank sidewalls carefully direct the views and provide an intimacy from the overlooking of adjacent houses.



► High up on one side, the junction of the roof and wall is opened by a glass slot, which lets direct sunlight enter and colour the interior space. This asymmetric oculi, creates a visual shift from the large window and provides patterns and shadows changing with the movements of the sun. The glass balustrades to the balcony and upper space are deliberately minimal in detail, and pick up the reflected light like prisms within the white interior.

A punched out space through one of the flank walls reveals a study room and lookout. This offers a dialogue across the main space at the upper level with the gallery. The master bedroom spatially continues



Above / Fire pulls you into the plan



Above and left / Building and garden are locked in conversation

out towards the large window onto the gallery and enjoys a dual aspect from front to back. The lowered soffit of this gallery space frames the view directly above the trees in the garden to the distant hills. Standing here you can almost feel the Mediterranean with such echoes of Corbusian space.

The back wall of the original house is revealed by the surface of the exposed brickwork and in so doing offers rich textures to counter the minimal white interior. The staircase that connects the two levels of the house turns below a generous rooflight that filters light through glass blocks into the depth of the plan and reveals the slate roof and chimney of the old house above. These openings are carefully positioned to dramatise the dialogue between the old and new and to illuminate a spatial sequence with different types of natural light. Several features from the original house are kept and become enriched in this new dialogue.

The organisation of the house is based simply on the placement of the more cellular rooms and staircase along a party wall strip of accommodation while the large volume and gallery floor runs through on the other side. The elevation to the garden subtly reveals this parallel composition in its massing.

By opening the back wall of the original house and introducing this new volume the house has been radically transformed. The simple and careful palate of materials throws the emphasis always on that of space, which in turn reveals the relationship to the changing colours and textures of the garden beyond. The restrictive frame of the old house, has been carefully opened up, reorganised and reshaped by Michael Doherty to give a new and imaginative configuration of space, light and open plan living. It celebrates the activities of urban living while creating a contemplative sense of calm amidst the city life of the Lisburn Road. ●

Paul Clarke